

February 15, 2000

Subject: Referring Cases to the ARS Supergrade Panel

To: Area Directors  
Assistant Administrator, OIRP  
RPES Panel Chairs

From: Edward B. Knipling /s/  
Associate Administrator

The RPES Advisory Committee recently brought to my attention a possible problem regarding Supergrade Panel referrals.

Current ARS policy provides that GM/S-15 positions scored at 54 points or above by a "regular" panel will be reviewed by the next available Supergrade Panel ("panel referral"). Area Directors are authorized to refer positions scored at least 52 points ("management referral").

Supergrade Panels convened since April 1996 have reviewed a total of 57 GM/S-15 positions. Of these, 24 (42%) were scored at only 50 or 52 points by the Supergrade Panel. Another 16 cases (28%) received final scores of 54 points ("top of grade"), and only 17 (30%) were scored for submission to the Department (56+ points). Further, several experienced Supergrade panelists have observed that many cases referred recently did not stand a realistic chance of being scored above grade 15.

These data and observations indicate that "regular" panels and Area Directors may be referring cases to the Supergrade Panel too liberally. I want to emphasize our expectation that only those **researchers who strongly meet all criteria of the "In Excess of Degree E" level of Factor IV in the OPM Research Grade Evaluation Guide** will be referred. Referral of cases which do not meet these demanding criteria is undesirable for several reasons:

- it requires unfruitful and time consuming factfinding by assigned indepth reviewers;
- it diverts panel time which could better be used reviewing strong cases;
- it raises unrealistic expectations in the minds of referred scientists; and,
- since Supergrade Panel caseload is limited to 12 cases and the panel convenes twice a year, it delays timely review of strong referrals and current ST employees.

We also expect the Supergrade Panel to continue exercising tough judgment. Panelists must confirm for submission to the Department only those cases clearly meeting Factor IV "In Excess of Degree E" criteria. Each submitted position must be occupied by a research scientist "universally acknowledged" as being among the absolute top ARS contributors to science and technology--a clearly established "world class" researcher.

cc: Head, RPE Staff